

ARTICLE APPEARED  
ON PAGE 28

NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW  
23 JANUARY 1983

## ABOUT BOOKS AND AUTHORS

By Edwin McDowell

### The De-Jinxing of Wild Bill Donovan

**O**N his deathbed in 1959, William Donovan asked that all his private papers be released at the appropriate time to an author who was an expert in intelligence and foreign affairs. Mr. Donovan's friends and associates designated several such authors, but each died before getting very far with the biography. "When they came to me I knew the project was jinxed, but I finally decided to accept, and it was fascinating," said Anthony Cave Brown, author of "The Last Hero: Wild Bill Donovan" (Times Books), recently reviewed in these pages.

Wild Bill Donovan founded the Office of Strategic Services and its offspring, the Central Intelligence Agency, and President Eisenhower described him as "the last hero." That may have been hyperbole, but it is clear from both Mr. Brown's book and the recent "Donovan, America's Master Spy" by Richard Dunlop (Rand McNally) that Donovan was one of the century's movers and shakers. He helped the United States Cavalry chase Pancho Villa, won the Medal of Honor, ran for Governor of New York and created a major law firm. "He was no organizational genius, but he was a brilliant salesman who could motivate almost anyone," Mr. Brown said.

The author, an Englishman, said he was approached to do the biography because of his earlier book "Bodyguard of Lies," about the intelligence operations for D-day. "I turned it down initially on grounds that English politics are byzantine enough, let alone American," he said. But he was finally persuaded that he could bring a different perspective to the project. Only then was he granted unlimited and unrestricted access to Donovan's personal papers and top secret archives, as well as to the diaries of Donovan's wife and to family letters.

Although the 891-page book deals widely with Donovan's and America's involvement in global espionage, matters far less earth-shaking made a lasting impression on the author. One was finding the microfilm from Donovan's wartime files (the only copy of the microfilm outside the C.I.A.) in a storage room under the ice-skating rink at New York's Rockefeller Center. And another discovery, which is not always apparent to Americans around election time, was what the author describes as "the flexibility" of American politics. "Here F.D.R., a Democrat, was chattering happily to Donovan, a Republican," Mr. Brown said. "Where I come from, Tories and Socialists don't even talk to each other." ■